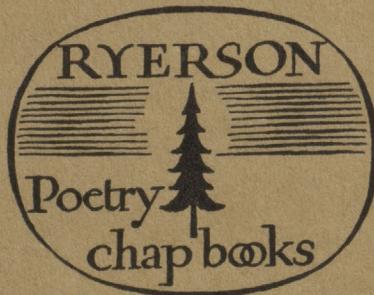
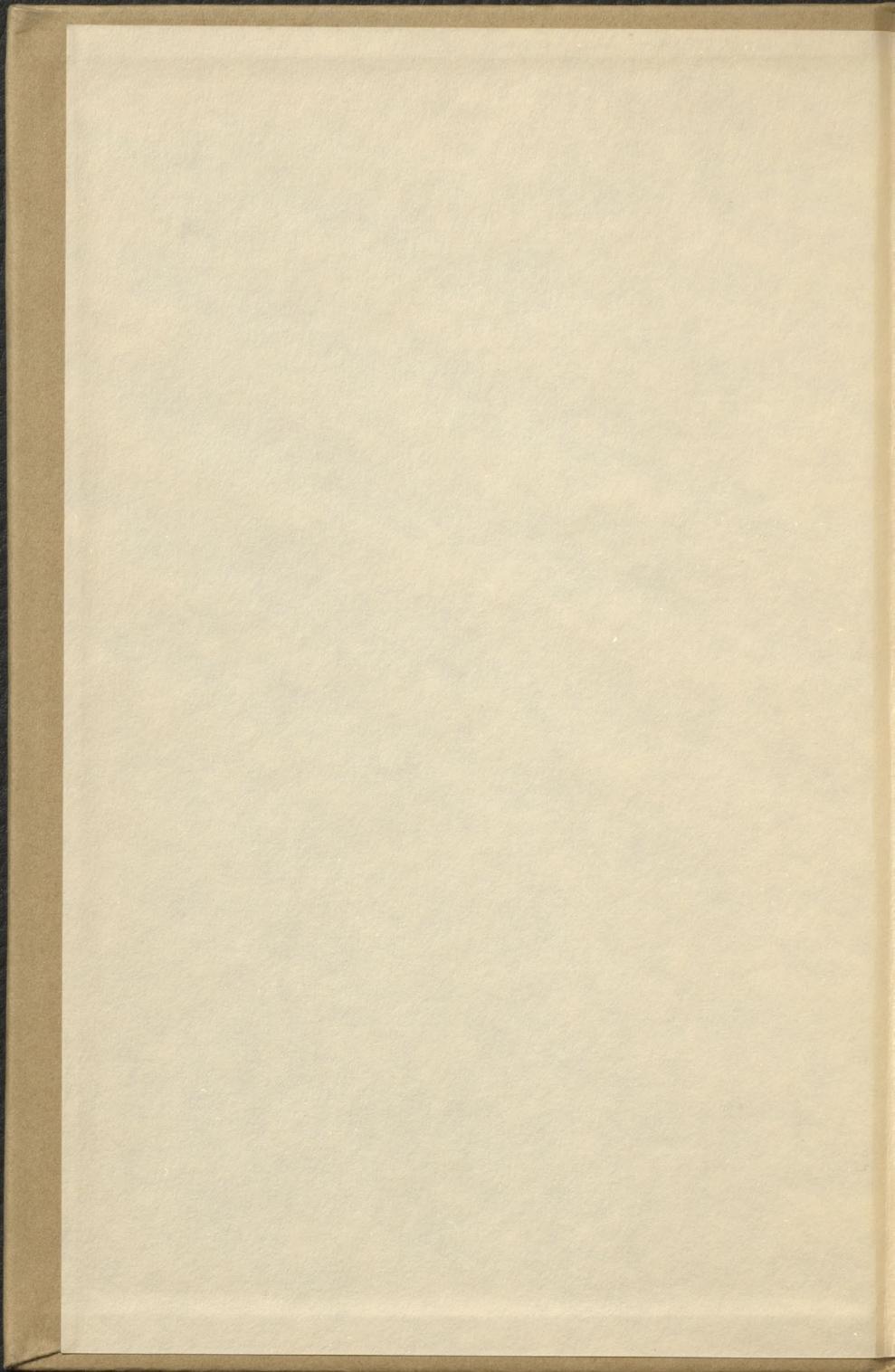

In The Egyptian Gallery

FRED SWAYZE



TORONTO · *The* RYERSON PRESS



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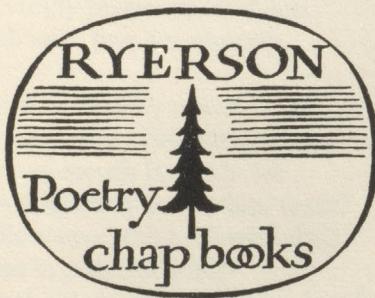
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In The Egyptian Gallery

FRED SWAYZE



TORONTO · *The* RYERSON PRESS

This is Chap-Book 196

OF THIS EDITION OF *IN THE EGYPTIAN GALLERY*,
BY FRED SWAYZE, TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES
ONLY HAVE BEEN PRINTED.

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In The Egyptian Gallery

IN THE EGYPTIAN GALLERY

(*The Royal Ontario Museum*)

I WHO once was An-tjau
Travestied lie here exposed
In this cunningly conditioned tomb
Perpetuating Egypt's drought
Lest mould and rust should bring to naught
The embalmer's art, the curator's skill.

The Ka that dwelt with me in the gloom
Of the rock-cut tomb fled long ago.
I am now a curiosity
Who lovingly prepared for death
To dwell with love for eternity.

May truth be told by necromancy
When none would listen to the unvoiced breath
At the open mouth but only see
Hardened lips and protruding teeth?
The hollow eyes, the hollowed skull,
The arms in pubic attitude
Ridging the stained brown linen bands
Are attributes of mortality.
Men gaze uncomprehendingly
At the resurrection of the body.

Neither Isis nor Osiris
Can here protect their ancient dead
Against the curious riddled with the virus
Of disbelief. Not heaven, not hell,
Not death itself has any reality
For these whose immortality
Has been forfeited for daily bread.

What heaven could ever be devised
To keep them fed, amused, surprised!
What rational hell could be invented
To teach a lesson to the self-demented!
What death could gladden or horrify
These who believe they will not die!

NO OTHER GODS

BEARDED and black, the rabbis
Enclosed in holy talk
Stride sightlessly through the market
On their way to the synagogue
To worship a desert god.

We surfeited shoppers who worship
Many gods, having come
To terms with Babylon,
Embrace our paper bags
Like fertility goddesses
Hugging mammoth breasts
And stare after the rabbis
As though, unfairly, someone
Had mentioned God or death
Or hunger, pain or grief
In a shocked silence.

REMEMBER NOW

“THAT we may remember them as we knew them,”
The mortician murmurs, *sotto voce*,
Deftly disguising death with cosmetics,
Flowers, soft lights and solicitude.

But not this! not Derry! This boy lying dead,
His calm, clear face a mask of sleep.
I have never learned to accept the death
Of a boy, not in all my years as a teacher.

I remember only the liveliness,
The eager hand upthrust, the frown
Of concentration, the smile that signalled
Comprehension, the flaring burst
Of temper and the gall of discipline,
The helmeted rugby hero limping
Back to the bench, the nervous tic
Along the jaw as intently he watched
The sweep of hockey—from the penalty box,
His gleaming shoulders and flushed face
When time was called in basketball,
The dance, the debate, the thousand things
That were Derry. But not this sleeping stranger!

I have learned to accept mortality
In the dead, soft-wrinkled faces of old men,
Shaven and scrubbed, powdered and rouged,
Tricked out and sent forth to meet their Maker.
“That we may remember them as we knew them.”

I shall remember Derry. He lives
In the shadowy halls of memory.
The summer lightning of his smile
Will bring the boy to mind, or his name
Will summon him, not like Samuel
Old and tired, "Why trouble ye me?",
Nor Lazarus-like, with the taint of the tomb.

A teacher's memory, like his day,
Is thronged with youngsters, and he may
At times forget whether he moves
Among the living or the dead.

PROSPECTUS

THERE *is* a time to live and a time to die.
The mining magnate died on the holiday,
Markets closed and margin gone, to lie
Immaculate, chilled and plumped, until Tuesday.

An indefatigable dropper of names,
He knew well how the other—and richer—half lives.
The right people came from Bay Street and St. James,
Or at least sent flowers and representatives.

Gushing pure unction, the right kind of clergyman
Mentioned his name favourably for Grace
And, compromising God, commissioned him
To one of the higher echelons of Space.

Encased in rosewood and bronze, he denied the earth
The ninety-nine cents of minerals he was worth.

FAMILY PLOT

HIGH above the cemetery pond
In a druid circle the ceremonial cedars
Stand around our monolithic marble,
Sombre monuments to family pride.

Father, deep among the twining roots,
Feet to the centre, is still proudly aloof
From the humble men he hired and underpaid
Who lie beyond the cedars in the open sun.

Mother, as small and gray and unobtrusive
As her marker, still protects her youngest son,
Poor silly Billy, assaulter of servant girls,
Put away at last by the firm hand of death.

Bessie now lies closer to her husband
Than in life, snugged down for eternity
Beside Bob, the eldest, who drank his inheritance neat—
From shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in two generations.

Charlie, the prodigal, is home for good,
And Addie, the Continuing Presbyterian,
United now with the vast majority.
And there, by Father, is room enough for me.

Down by the still waters, red-winged blackbirds
Sway on the reeds; pheasants thread the rushes,
And vireos call incessantly from the elms.
Field mice tunnel the weeds; rabbits spring
Violently to escape the hunting hound,
While bedded on moss frogs blink solemnly.

I have an elderly desire to be cremated
And scattered anonymously beside the pond.

OLD MISTER GARRITY

OLD Mister Garrity died this spring.

The street's best gardener left us
When the mid-March sun was gratefully warm.
As yet his lawn was sodden brown;
His cedars were boxed; spireas staked
And bound like martyrs to searing snow;
His roses still were buried deep,
Safe from frost; and his hotbed, banked
And heating, stared blindly back at the sun.

From the elm that shelters St. Mary's tower
A robin sang all during Mass.
Prayers said, his neighbours rose
Stiffly and followed the priest to the door.
The undertaker's young men, lounging
In the mourners' car from the quickening chill,
Stubbed their cigarettes and advanced
Ceremoniously to the church's steps,

Like morning-coated diplomats of death
Smoothly assuming a preternatural calm.

FROG-CATCHER

WITH cunning sufficient to make the kill
the little boy stalks a frog
moving cautiously
with an acquired skill
through the sibilant reeds
putting each foot down into the moss
and mud and weeds
as deliberately
and silently
as had the great blue heron
that, frozen into immobility,
watches him unawares
with cold unblinking eye.

His outstretched hand talon-tense
poised
with bright unblinking eyes the boy
hovers
pounces.
With splash and shout of satisfaction
exultant and triumphant
he holds up the clutched and captive frog
its legs stark against his wrist
like Jove grasping galvanic thunderbolts.

In cold contempt
the heron lifts itself
awkwardly beating up
until it assumes again
its gracefulness in smooth rhythmic sweep
legs trailing
and neck doubled back
and its head like that of a striking snake.

ANGELS SOMETIMES FORGET

ANGELS sometimes forget whether they move
Among the living or the dead. For we
Who attempt to parcel out eternity
Into life and death, the Psalmist's span will prove
To be but the hour before the dawn. The dead
Are always with us. Just back of conscious thought
They stand smiling. Like the angels, we are caught
Turning to speak, lost unawares in love.

WINTER SOLSTICE

THE ritual sun stood still
In his appointed place
Aligned with altar and marking stone,
Blood-red on the monolith,
Blood-red on the new snow,
Blood-red on the knife
Poised above a boy's arched ribs.

The Christmas star stood still
In his appointed place
Aligned with town and ancient trail,
Blood-red on the threshold,
Blood-red on the helmet,
Blood-red on the sword.
Spring was ever bought with blood.

THE MIRACLE IS

Put together in the proper way, we all turn out to be a rather weak, watery solution of salts and carbon compounds, more or less jellified. The miracle is that such stuff as we are made of should walk and talk and know such things as song and sadness.

N. J. BERRILL, in *You and The Universe*

THIS is carbon speaking
intricately compounded
and immersed in watery salts.

Jellyfellow
of all who live and die
daily, compact of faults,
tried and found wanting,

I have known sadness
smarting tears and despair
black and diamond hard
and thought my life ill-starred.

Grateful for song
loving laughter and gladness,
content that the miracle
should be rounded with a sleep.

COUNT DOWN

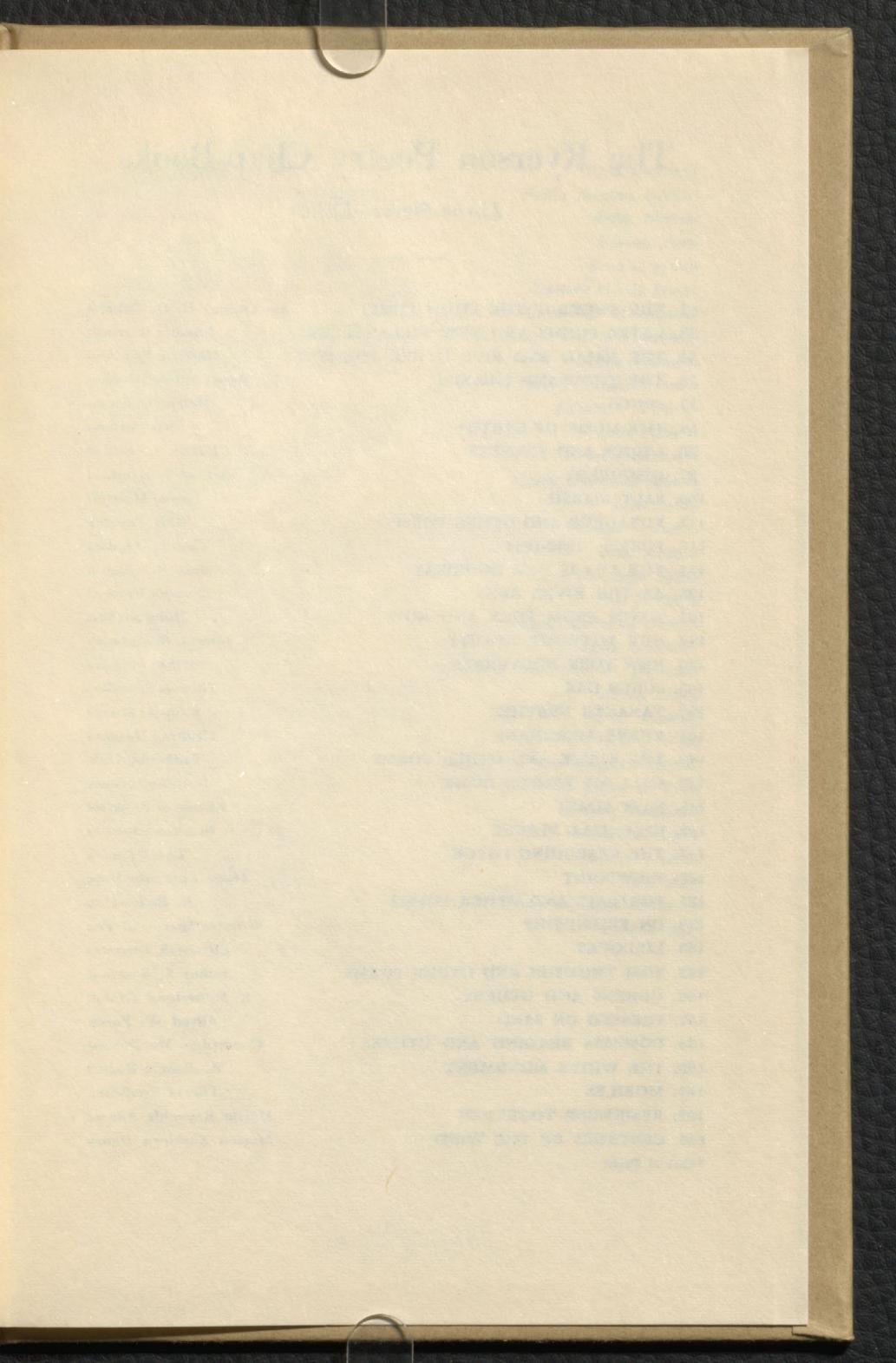
FIVE Here we are
 Alive,
 Fat kine waiting for the lean
 Of half a hungry world
 To come and lick us clean.

FOUR On our knees
 For—?
 Forty million refugees
 To learn the Golden Rule
 And love their enemies?

THREE To be or not?
 Me?
 A fiery rot in my chromosomes
 And radioactive bones?

TWO You and me
 Too?
 O space is time and time
 Will be the death of me.

ONE Is One and all
 Alone
 Again and evermore
 Shall be so.



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